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## Media Release

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### **Attorney General's Office takes action to fight home improvement fraud**

**Wilmington, DE** – The Delaware Attorney General's Office is warning consumers to be aware of home improvement fraud and announced criminal sentencings in two construction fraud cases:

- From June to August 2007, Wilbert C. Saunders, age 53 of Newark, received over \$11,000 in payments for home renovations which were never completed. Saunders pled guilty on February 18, 2009 in New Castle County Superior Court to Home Improvement Fraud by False Pretense and Theft by False Promise over \$1,000. He was sentenced on April 24, 2009 to 3 years and 6 months in prison, followed by 18 months probation, and was ordered to pay \$11,169 restitution to his victims.
- During July and August 2007, Keith Tracey, age 41 of Wyoming, and Deana Irwin, age 43 of Camden, collected \$8,316 as a down payment for deck construction and never completed the work. Tracey pled guilty on April 28, 2009 in Kent County Superior Court to Felony Home Improvement Fraud and was sentenced to 6 months in prison, followed by 18 months of probation, in addition to paying restitution to the victims. Irwin pled guilty on April 30, 2009 in Kent County Superior Court to Misdemeanor Home Improvement Fraud and was sentenced to 12 months of probation in addition to paying restitution to the victims.

“Protect yourself against contractor fraud by being an informed consumer,” stated Timothy Mullaney, Director of the Attorney General's Fraud and Consumer Protection Division. “Shop around, check references, and never pay the full price in advance. By following these basic rules you'll go a long way to avoiding many common home construction scams. And if you or a loved one has become a victim, contact the Attorney General's office for help.”

The Attorney General's Office recommends using the following checklist to help protect yourself against home improvement fraud:

#### Home Improvement Checklist – What to do before you hire a contractor

1. **Know what work you want to have completed.** Make a specific list. This will allow you to easily negotiate with contractors

2. **Know what permits are needed.** Even though a qualified contractor should be aware of necessary permits and inspections, you should know them too. Check with your local building and codes office before beginning a project.
3. **Shop around.** Meet with multiple contractors, obtain written quotes for the work you want done, and compare. Think carefully before making a decision.
4. **Get references and check them.** Ask friends and neighbors which contractors they used for home improvement projects and whether or not they were satisfied with the results. Ask contractors for references and speak to former customers.
5. **Get a Timeline.** Find out the proposed timeline for when a contractor will start and complete the project.
6. **Never pay the full price in advance.** Establish a payment schedule and stick to it. This may include an initial down payment, followed by additional incremental payments until the work is completed.
7. **Put it in writing.** The contractor should provide a written contract which includes a timeline for work to be completed, a payment schedule and as many specifics as possible about the project, such as types or brands of materials. Do not be induced into signing a contract by high-pressure sales tactics.

Consumers who are aware of home improvement fraud and/or who have questions are encouraged to call the Attorney General's Consumer Hotline at 1-800-220-5424.

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